**The Glasser Model**

Written by Administrator

**The Glasser Model of Rational Choices**

Glasser's work in the field of school discipline has two main focuses. The first is to provide a classroom environment and curriculum which motivate students and reduce inappropriate behavior by meeting students' basic needs for belonging, power, fun, and freedom . The second focus is on helping students make appropriate behavioral choices that lead ultimately to personal success.

**Glasser's Key Ideas (pre 1985).**

1. Students are rational beings. They can control their own behavior. They choose to act the way they do.   
2. Good choices produce good behavior. Bad choices produce bad behavior.   
3. Teachers must always try to help students make good choices.   
4. Teachers who truly care about their students accept no excuses for bad behavior.   
5. Reasonable consequences should always follow student behavior, whether it is good or bad.   
6. Class rules are essential and they must be enforced.   
7. Classroom meetings are effective vehicles for attending to matters concerning class rules, behavior and discipline.

**Glasser's Fundamental Views**

Glasser's pre-1985 views about discipline were simple and powerful:

* Behavior is a matter of choice.
* Good behavior results from good choices. Bad behavior results from bad choices.
* A teacher's duty is to help students make good choices.

Psychologists and educators often delve into students' backgrounds for underlying causes of misbehavior. One often hear comments such as, "What can you expect, Johnny comes from a broken home", or, "Sue was an abused child", or,"Nathan's family lives in poverty." Glasser neither denies that such conditions exist nor that they influence behavior. He simply says that humans have rational minds and can make rational choices.

Students are capable of understanding what is generally regarded as acceptable school behavior and can choose to behave in acceptable ways. However, in order to make good choices, students must see the results of these choices as desirable. If bad behavior gets them what they want then they will make bad choices. This is where the teacher can be influential in helping students become aware that they choose their own actions. The teacher forces them to acknowledge their behavior and to make value judgments about it. The teacher refuses to accept excuses for bad behavior. Instead the teacher always directs the student's attention to alternative, more acceptable, behaviour. The essence of discipline then, lies in helping students make good choices.

**What Teachers Should Do**

Glasser (1978) firmly believes that teachers hold the key to good discipline. He concludes that both teachers and students have important roles to play in maintaining effective discipline, but today he puts much greater responsibility on the shoulders of teachers than he formerly did. He has always maintained that the following actions are the teacher's responsibility, they are:

1. Stress student responsibility.

Since good behavior. comes from good choices and since students ultimately must live with the choices they make, their responsibility for their own behavior. is always kept in the forefront. Discussions in which this responsibility is explored and clarified occur in classroom meetings. These meetings occur as regular parts of the curriculum. Students sit in a tight circle with the teacher and discuss matters that concern the class.

2. Establish rules that lead to success.

Glasser considers class rules to be essential. He has given many examples of programs and classes that have attempted to operate without rules, in the mistaken belief that rules stifle initiative, responsibility, and self-direction. He stresses that rules are essential, especially for students who have done poorly in school. Permissiveness for those students tends to be destructive.

It fosters antagonism, ridicule, and lack of respect for teachers and others. Rules should be established by teachers and students together, and should facilitate personal and group achievement. Rules should be adapted to the age, ability, and other realities of the students. One thing is essential: Rules must reinforce the basic idea that students are in school to study and learn.

Furthermore, rules should constantly be evaluated to see whether they are useful. When no longer useful, they should be discarded or changed. So long as they are retained, however, they must be enforced.

3. Accept no excuses.

For discipline to be successful, teachers must accept no excuses. Glasser uses this "no excuse" dictum in two areas. The first has to do with conditions outside the school. What goes on there does not excuse bad behavior. in school. Those conditions may, indeed, cause bad behavior., but that does not make it acceptable.

The teacher must never say "we can excuse Bill's behavior. today because he has trouble at home. It is okay if he yells and hits." The second area in which Glasser says teachers should accept no excuses concerns student commitment. Once a student has decided on a course of good behavior. and has made a commitment to it, the teacher must never accept excuses for the student's failing to live up to that commitment.

A teacher who accepts an excuse says, in effect, that it is alright to break a commitment, that it is alright for students to harm themselves. Teachers who care, Glasser says, accept no excuses.

4. Call for value judgment.

When students exhibit inappropriate behavior., teachers should have them make value judgments about it. Glasser (1977) suggests the following procedure when a student is misbehaving:

*Teacher: "What are you doing?" (asked in unthreatening tone of voice.)*

*Student: (Will usually give an honest answer if not threatened.)*

*Teacher: "Is that helping you or the class?" Student: "No."*

*Teacher: "What could you do that would help?"*

*Student: (Names better behavior.; if can think of none, teacher suggests appropriate alternatives and lets student choose.)*

Sometimes the student does not respond in an acceptable way, but instead replies hostilely or caustically. For that eventuality, Glasser presents the following scenarios:

*i) Student misbehaving. Teacher: "What are you doing? Is it against the rules? What should you be doing?" Student: (Responds negatively, unacceptably.) Teacher: I would like to talk with you privately at (specifies time).*

*ii) Private conference between teacher and student.*

*Teacher: " What were you doing? was it against the rules? What should you have been doing?"*

*Student: (Agrees to proper course of behavior.).*

*iii) Student later repeats the misbehavior. Teacher calls for another private conference.*

*Teacher: "We have to work this out. What kind of plan can you make so you can follow the rules?*

*Student: "I'll stop doing it".*

*Teacher: " No, we need a plan that says exactly what you will do. Let's make a simple plan that you can follow. I'll help you."*

*Teacher assigns "time out". This is isolation from the group. Student is not allowed to participate with the group again until making a commitment to the teacher to adhere to the plan. If the student disrupts during time out, he is excluded from the classroom. (A contingency plan should be set up in advance with the principal.)*

*v) Student, after returning to the group, disrupts again.*

*Teacher: "Things are not working out here for you and me. We have tried hard. You must leave the class. As soon as you have a plan you are sure will allow you to follow the rules of the class, let me know. We can try again, but for now, please report to the principal's office." (Principal was informed in advance of this possibility.)*

*vi) If a student is out of control, principal notifies parents and asks them to pick up the student at school immediately.*

*vii) Students who are repeatedly sent home are referred to a special school or class, or to a different community agency. By following this procedure consistently, teachers can cause students to doubt the value of their misbehavior., make responsible and better choices, and thus gradually make a commitment to choosing behaviors that bring personal success instead of failure.*

5. Suggest suitable alternatives.

First grader Nathan has been having trouble lining up promptly when the bell rings. Mrs Smith offered him two choices: either (i) get in line immediately when the bell rings, or (ii) be last to go for recess. Nathan chose number one. He understands that he is expected to live by his choice, and Mrs Smith helps him remember that. Misbehaving students will sometimes be unable to think of appropriate behaviors they might select. The teacher should then suggest two or three acceptable alternatives.

6. Invoke reasonable consequences.

Glasser stresses that reasonable consequences must follow whatever behavior the student chooses. These consequences will be desirable if good behavior is chosen and undesirable if poor behavior is chosen. Never should teachers manipulate events so that these consequences do not occur. The knowledge that behavior always brings consequences, and that individuals can largely choose behavior that brings pleasant as opposed to unpleasant consequences, builds the sense that people are in charge of their own lives and in control of their own behavior

7. Be persistent

Caring teachers work toward one goal - getting students to commit themselves to desirable courses of behavior Commitment means constancy, doing something repeatedly, intentionally, while making sure that it is right. To convey this idea and help implant it in students, teachers themselves must be constant. They must always help students make choices and have them make value judgments about their bad choices.

8. Carry out continual review.

For Glasser, the classroom meeting is central to implementation of a good system of discipline. Glasser advocates three types of classroom meetings:

*(i) social problem solving,   
(ii) educational diagnostic, and   
(iii) open ended.*

Discussions in classroom meetings focus on two things:

*(i) identifying the problem, and   
(ii) seeking solutions to the problem.*

Students are never allowed to find fault with others, place blame on them, or seek to punish them. The teacher remains in the background during the discussion, giving opinions sparingly and participating in a way that reflects student attitudes back to the group for examination.

Glasser stresses that the meetings require practice before they are successful, and that unless they are focused on finding solutions, they will not produce the desired effect.

**Comments on pre 1985 Glasser**

In Glasser's earlier work, he cast the school in quite a positive light. While acknowledging that problems existed for some students, he steadfastly maintained that schools afforded student the best - often the only - opportunity to associate with quality adults who genuinely cared about them. Schools therefore offered students the best opportunity many would ever have for finding belonging, success, and positive self-identity.

In order to take advantage of this crucial opportunity, students were continually asked to make value judgments about their misbehavior, urged to make good choices and plans that improve their chances for good choices, and confronted with the consequences of their good and bad choices.

As you will see in the material that follows, Glasser now places much greater onus on the schools. Schools he maintains, should be refocused in terms of student needs and the meeting of those needs, rather than moulding students to deal with the conditions that they encounter in schools.

**Glasser's post 1985 Key Ideas**

1. All of our behavior is our best attempt to control ourselves to meet our needs.  
2. We always choose to do what is most satisfying to us at the time.  
3. All of us have inborn needs that we continually attempt to satisfy. Included among those inborn needs are:

*a.) To belong   
b.) To gain power   
c.) To be free   
d.) To have fun*

4. We feel pleasure when these needs are met, and frustration when they are not.  
5. We feel a continual urge to act when any need is unsatisfied.  
6. If schools are to have good discipline, they must create classes in which fewer students and teachers are frustrated.  
7. Only a discipline program that is concerned with classroom satisfaction will work.

That means that students must feel they belong, have some power, have a sense of freedom, and have fun in learning. Glasser's new views on discipline have occurred as a direct extensions of his conclusions concerning the condition of schooling at the secondary level.

He maintains that "no more than half of our secondary school students are willing to make an effort to learn, and therefore cannot be taught." (1985, p.3) This is true despite dedicated teachers' best efforts, and therefore "I believe we have gone as far as we can go with the traditional structure of our secondary schools" (1985, p.6).

How does Glasser account for this situation? consider his description of a good school which he defines as "A place where almost all students believe that if they do some work, they will be able to satisfy their needs enough so that it makes sense to keep trying" (1985, p.15).

Glasser maintains that most schools do not meet students' needs to a level sufficient to keep more than half of them involved with the curriculum. And what are those needs that are not being met? Glasser emphasizes four of them, which he contends are genetically inborn and cannot be denied even by students who would try, the four needs are:

1. The need to belong, to feel accepted, to be a member of the group or class.
2. The need for power, not so much power over others as power to control part of one's life and power to do things competently.
3. The need for freedom, to feel at least partly in control of self, self reliant, without constant direction from others.
4. The need for fun, for enjoyment, for pleasure, for satisfaction.

Glasser would have schools recognize these four fundamental needs that play powerful roles in student behavior, recognize that students cannot deny those needs and must try to fulfill them, and recognize that schooling can and should be restructured in such a manner that it will meet those needs for students.

Glasser believes that unsatisfying classrooms can be made better almost at once, by teachers moving from traditional structure to having students work together in small learning teams. He feels small learning groups of about four in number offer the following advantages:

1. Sense of belonging for all students.
2. Motivation for students to work on behalf of the group.
3. Stronger students meet their needs for power and friendships by helping weaker students in the group.
4. Weaker students have needs met by contributing to the group.
5. Students are freed from over-dependence on the teacher; they help each other.

He contrasts these advantages with traditional classroom organisation in which:

1. Students work as individuals.
2. Unless students are achievers, there is little motivation to work.
3. Weaker students contribute little to the class.
4. Dependence on the teacher is unduly high.
5. Student boredom is high; bored students will not work.

Glasser advocates learning teams because they better meet students' needs and therefore increase work output while reducing discipline problems. If they accomplish what he suggests, they would be well worth using for those reasons alone. However, research is accumulating quite rapidly that shows that cooperative learning produces significantly better overall educational results than does individual learning.

**Comments on Glasser's Model**

It is reasonable to conclude that Glasser would have teachers begin with organizing their classes so as to meet students' needs to the extent possible. But he concedes that probably about 25% of the secondary students will be unproductive. And of course even productive students often present discipline problems.

Once the class is better organised to meet students' needs, then Glasser's earlier suggestions on how to deal with misbehaving students are still appropriate. Simple improvement in meeting student needs, while tremendously important, does not do away with all misbehavior Students therefore should still be helped to see that good behavior choices lead to better results.

They should still be urged to show responsibility for their actions and to be considerate of others. Thus, Glasser's model of discipline can now be seen in this expanded form - first organize the class to meet needs as well as possible, then continue to use intervention strategies for controlling and improving behavior

**Application of the Model**

(John will not work)

John, a student in Mrs. Jade's class, is quite docile. He never disrupts class and does little socializing with other students. But despite Mrs. Jade's best efforts, John rarely completes an assignment. He doesn't seem to care. He is simply there, putting forth virtually no effort. How would Glasser deal with John?

Glasser would first suggest that Mrs. Jade think carefully about the classroom and the program to try to determine whether they contain obstacles that prevent John from meeting his needs for belonging, fun, power, and freedom. He would have Mrs. Jade talk directly with John about this matter. If changes are needed for him, Mrs. Jade should make them if possible.

If no changes seem warranted, Glasser would have Mrs. Jade talk with John so as to accomplish the following:

1. Make sure John understands his work responsibilities as a student in the class.
2. Make sure John understands that he can choose his behavior - to work or not - and that his choice brings with it either desirable or undesirable consequences.
3. Accept no excuses from John for not beginning and completing his work.
4. Help John identify some alternative behaviors from which he can choose.
5. Continually press John to make value judgments about his choice of behavior
6. Make sure that when John shows improvement, he receives consequences that are very attractive to him. 7. Never give up on John.

Further information regarding this model may be found in the following references: Charles, C.M., 1989, Building classroom discipline: from models to practice, Longmans Inc., New York. (pages 118-132).

Glasser, W., 1985, Control theory in the classroom, Perennial Library, New York.

Glasser, W., 1990, The quality school: Managing students without coercion, Harper and Row, New York.